



# 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Fiction

American Nation, the Old and the New



# *Imagined Communities*


Benedict Anderson



# Introduction

Nation, nationality, nationalism have proven extremely difficult to define (3)



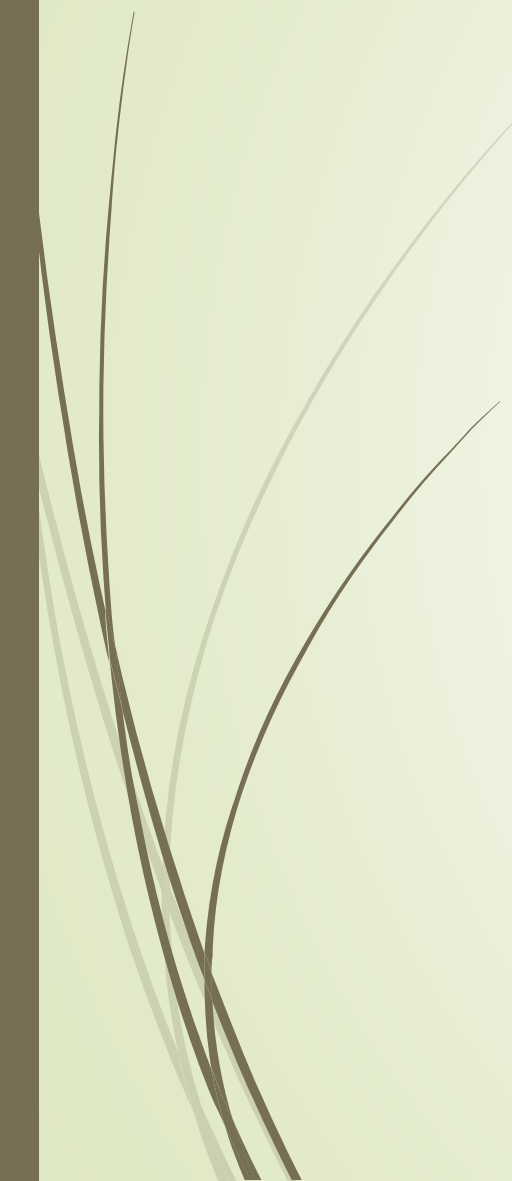


“I am driven to the conclusion that no ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and it exists” (3)

Hugh Seton-Watson (1916-1984), Historian




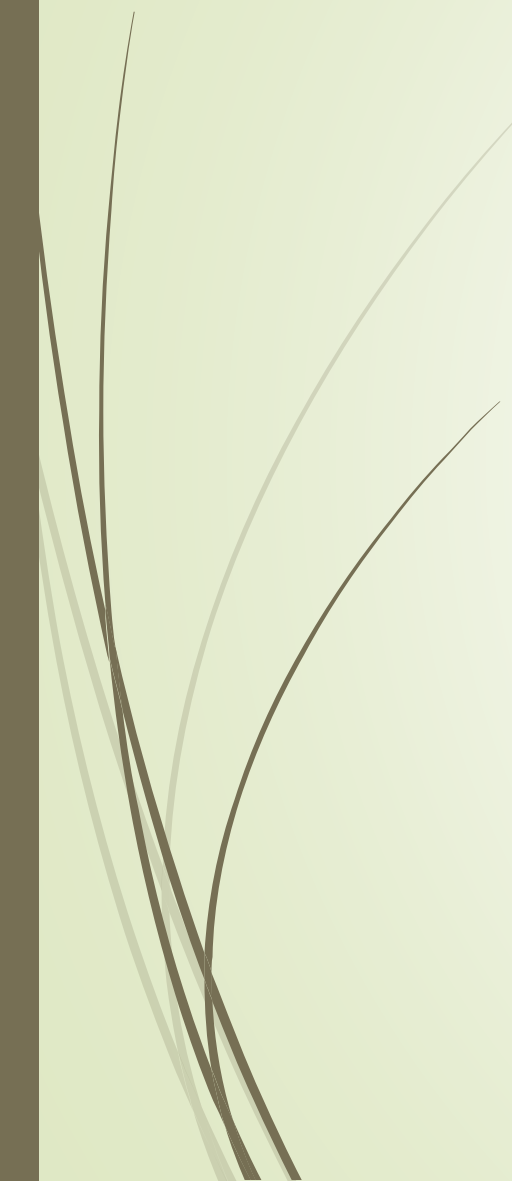
# Theorists have to deal with three paradoxes:

- The objective modernity VS the subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists
  - The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept VS the particularity of its concrete manifestations
  - The political power of nationalism VS their philosophical poverty and incoherence (5)
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“Nation is an **imagined** political  
**community** – and imagined as both  
inherently **limited** and **sovereign**” (6)

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- It is IMAGINED because...
  - It is LIMITED because...
  - It is imagined as SOVEREIGN because...
  - It is imagined as COMMUNITY because...
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# Space New and Old


- New and Old synchronically and diachronically
- In order for this parallelism to exist it was necessary that:
  - The distance and the groups were large
  - The newer was permanently settled
  - and firmly subordinated to the older (187-88)


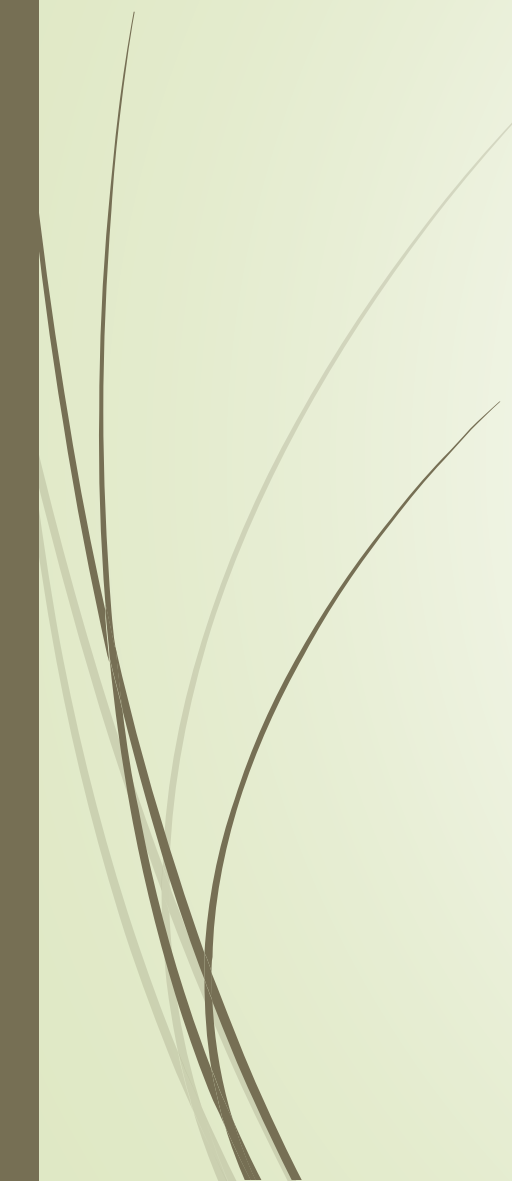


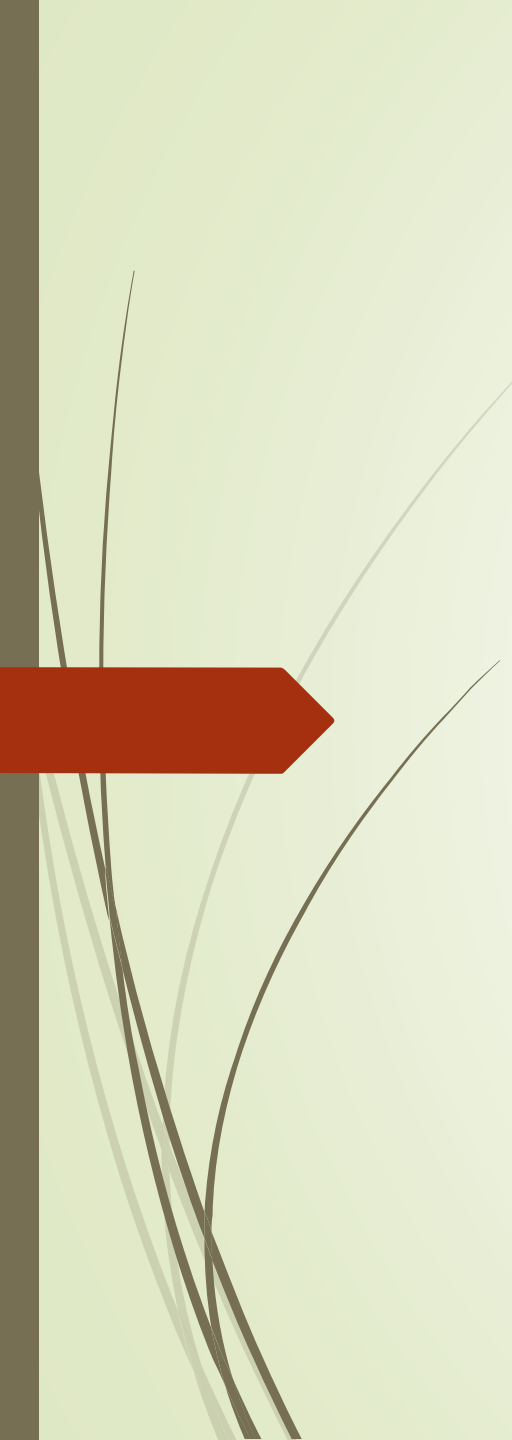


There are two peculiar features of the revolutions in the New World:

- I. The revolutionaries didn't dream of keeping the empire intact, but rearranging its internal distribution of power
- II. Although there was a lot of barbarity, the creoles didn't fear physical extermination or slavery (191)

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- It is difficult now to imagine how people can feel a nation as **utterly new!**
  - The justification of the independence was not “historical.” **There was no reference** to Columbus or the Pilgrim Fathers (193).

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- In Europe the new nationalisms almost immediately began to imagine themselves as “awakening from sleep.”
  - This idea was popular for two reasons:
    - I. It seemed to explain why nationalist movements had started in the ‘civilized’ Old World so obviously later than in the ‘barbarous’ New.
    - II. It provided a crucial metaphorical link between the new European nationalisms and language (195-96)

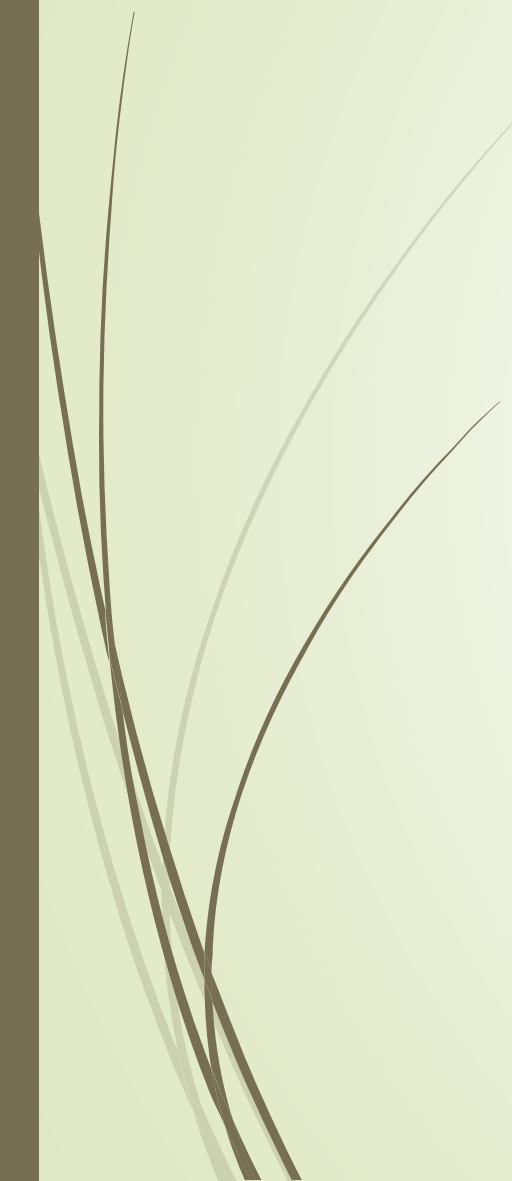


For obvious reasons language was not included in the nationalistic narrative of the New World.

What are these reasons?

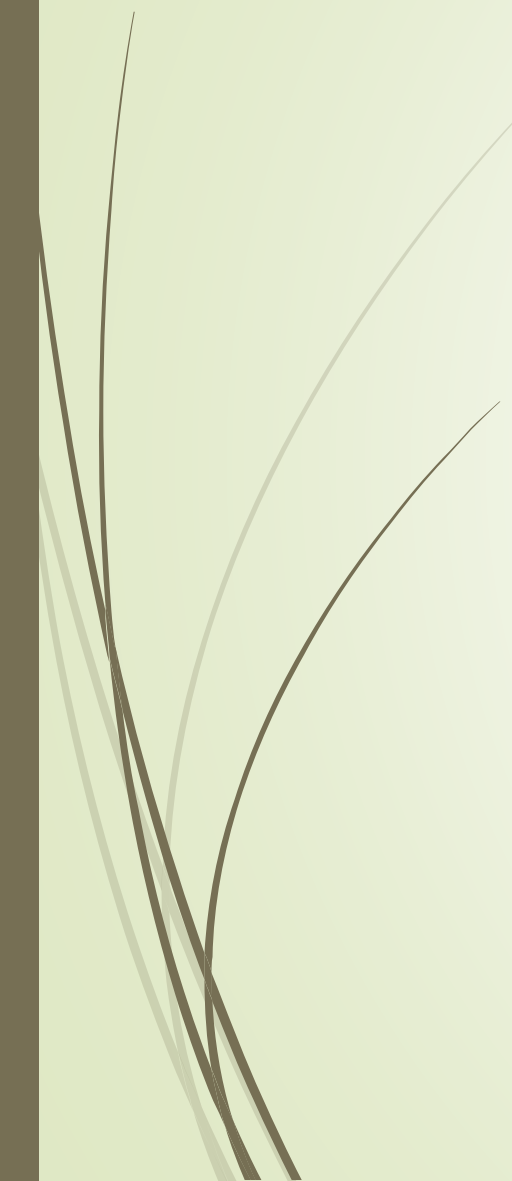


# The solution came through HISTORY


- First academic chairs in History: 1810 at the University of Berlin and 1812 at Sorbonne (Paris)
  - Writing on behalf of the dead (198)
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# The reassurance of fratricide



A vast pedagogical industry works ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861-65 as a great 'civil' war between 'brothers' rather than between – as they briefly were – two sovereign states (201).



All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives (204).